

**STATEMENT BY ATTORNEY NANCY SHEEHAN
ON BEHALF OF
FORMER ASSEMBLY MEMBER SEBASTIAN RIDLEY-THOMAS**

During my 30 years of employment law practice, which has included conducting workplace investigations and defending cases based on workplace investigations, I would be hard-pressed to recall a more prejudicial complaint and investigative process than this one. It defied any definition of due process and objectivity, did not comply with the Assembly's own policies, and the outcome is tainted by the knowledge that the process was used for retaliatory purposes.

After the Assembly Rules Committee informed my client in November 2017 that he was being investigated for alleged violation of an unspecified policy, it steadfastly refused to provide us with the most basic information about the complainants and their allegations until my client was interviewed by an investigator eight months later.

We were given a relatively short time afterward to pull together responsive documentation on his behalf. But this was in no way commensurate with the full year that the complainants had to prepare their allegations before my client was interviewed. There is nothing about the manner in which the Rules Committee conducted this investigation that is consistent with the right to due process woven throughout California law, no less the Assembly's representation that investigations will be fair and objective.

Furthermore, the investigator instructed us that all information regarding the investigation was to be kept confidential. We followed the investigator's instructions. Others involved in the investigation process did not.

Someone within the very small group of Assembly personnel who were aware of the allegations leaked news of the investigation to the media, resulting in a front-page story in the *Los Angeles Times* while the investigation was taking place. This gross abuse of power by someone with access to confidential information was an act of retaliation against my client for voluntarily participating in the investigation. Such retaliation is strictly prohibited under the Assembly's own policies. The Assembly's only response to our complaint and request for an investigation was that it could not identify the source of the leak, which shows it cannot guarantee the fair investigation process it purports to provide.

The amount of redaction in the documents released by the Assembly shows that most of the allegations were unsubstantiated. For those that remain, my client refuted each one point by point during the investigation and provided evidence supporting his position. He continues to strongly deny the claims.

In light of how this investigation was skewed, it is difficult to have confidence in its findings. Allegations of sexual harassment are serious. The process used to investigate them and make findings needs to be careful, fair to all involved, and conducted with absolute integrity. Unfortunately, this wasn't true in my client's case and is therefore unacceptable.

###